

Message Text

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AUG 23, 1978

QUOTE: UNCLAS TEL AVIV 10824

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION PRESS REVIEW, AUGUST 23, 1978
(FIRST OF TWO CABLES: PM BEGIN MEETS "SECRETLY" WITH TOP
ADVISERS OVER SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON.)

1. SUMMARY: YESTERDAY, DAVAR AND THE JERUSALEM POST
REPORTED THAT SYRIA MIGHT FEEL THAT NOW IS THE TIME TO
TAKE SOME DECISIVE MILITARY ACTION AGAINST LEBANON'S
CHRISTIANS, OWING TO THE FACT THAT ISRAEL WOULD BE
RELUCTANT TO REACT TOO STRONGLY ON THE EVE OF THE CAMP
DAVID TALKS. TODAY'S MORNING PAPERS REPORT THAT DEFMIN
WEIZMAN TOLD KNESSET DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
THAT THE "SOME 35,000 SYRIAN TROOPS IN LEBANON COULD WIPE
OUT ALL CHRISTIAN FORCES WITHIN 48 HOURS," AND THAT
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"ISRAEL SHOULD ACT WITH FIRMNESS....BUT IF IT INTERVENES
MILITARILY, IT COULD TRIGGER A GENERAL WAR...." THE TWO
. URGENT MEETING" WHICH TOOK PLACE LAST NIGHT AT PM BEGIN'S
RESIDENCE, AND IN WHICH DAYAN, WEIZMAN AND THE CHIEF OF
STAFF TOOK PART, TOGETHER WITH "A MYSTERIOUS GUEST...
PERHAPS FROM LEBANON...." THE DISCUSSION AT THAT MEETING
IS REPORTED TO HAVE FOCUSED ON THE SITUATION IN LEBANON

AND ON "FEAR OF SYRIAN ATTACK" THERE. END SUMMARY.

2. SOUTH LEBANON:

A) SCREAMING HEADLINES IN MAARIV AND YEDIOT REPORT ON "SECRET... URGENT... NIGHTTIME CONSULTATION AT PM BEGIN'S RESIDENCE... WITH FONMIN DAYAN, DEFMIN WEIZMAN, CHIEF OF STAFF EITAN... AND A MYSTERIOUS GUEST FROM ABROAD..." MAARIV ADDS THAT ISRAEL "FEARS A SYRIAN ATTACK" ON LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS. YEDIOT SPECULATES THAT "THE MYSTERIOUS GUEST... MAY HAVE COME FROM AN ARAB COUNTRY... PERHAPS FROM LEBANON." THE ISSUE OF THE "SECRET MEETING WITH AN ARAB PERSONALITY" WAS ALSO MENTIONED ON THE 10 A.M. RADIO NEWS PROGRAM.

B) MAARIV'S DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT WRITES THAT "THE DEPLOYMENT OF SYRIAN TROOPS AROUND BEIRUT, AND THE DISPATCHING OF REINFORCEMENTS TO THIS SECTOR, HAVE STRENGTHENED THE FEELING THAT DAMASCUS MAY BE SEEKING TO BREAK THE BACKBONE OF THE CHRISTIAN FORCES." ACCORDING TO THE MAARIV CORRESPONDENT, "THIS ISSUE WAS PROBABLY DISCUSSED LAST NIGHT AT BEGIN'S HOME." MAARIV ADDS THAT "IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT ISRAEL IS ENGAGED IN INTENSIVE CONTACTS WITH THE U.S. OVER CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON, IN LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT THE U.S. HAS ASKED ISRAEL TO DO NOTHING "WHICH WILL SURPRISE THE U.S. - MAARIV FURTHER REPORTS THAT "THE STATUS OF THE U.N. FORCE IN THE TERRITORIES EVACUATED BY ISRAEL AFTER THE LITANI UNCLASSIFIED

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OPERATION, AND ITS INABILITY TO PREVENT TERRORIST INFILTRATION, WAS PROBABLY ALSO DISCUSSED LAST NIGHT AT BEGIN'S HOME."

C) YEDIOT'S ZIMUKI REPORTS THAT "AFTER THE MEETING ENDED, A CAR WAS SEEN PULLING AWAY FROM A SIDE GATE, ATTEMPTING TO EVADE REPORTERS' CAMERAS." ACCORDING TO YEDIOT, "A GUARD NEAR BEGIN'S HOME SAID THAT HE WAS TOLD THE GUEST WAS U.N. UNDERSECRETARY GENERAL BRIAN URQUHART," BUT THAT A U.N. SPOKESMAN SAID THAT THIS WAS "MOST UNLIKELY..."

D) PRESS FRONTPAGES REMARKS ATTRIBUTED TO DEFMIN WEIZMAN, WHO YESTERDAY TESTIFIED BEFORE THE KNESSET DEFENSE AND .FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. WEIZMAN REPORTEDLY "WARNED... -- THAT THE SYRIAN ARMY IN LEBANON, WHICH NOW IS 30,000 TO 40,000 STRONG, CAN, IF IT SO WISHES, WIPE OUT ALL THE CHRISTIAN FORCES IN LEBANON WITHIN 48 HOURS..." WEIZMAN IS SAID TO HAVE SUGGESTED THAT "WE TAKE A FIRM STAND VIS-A-VIS THE SYRIANS, FORBID THEM FROM ADVANCING BEYOND THEIR PRESENTLY-HELD LINES." WEIZMAN IS SAID TO HAVE OBSERVED, HOWEVER, THAT "AN ISRAELI MILITARY INTERVENTION COULD TRIGGER A GENERAL WAR."

E) MAARIV'S MILITARY CORRESPONDENT YA'ACOV EREZ REPORTS

IN A FRONT PAGE STORY THAT "SENIOR ELEMENTS IN ISRAEL ARE
CONCERNED BY REPORTS THAT THE SYRIANS INTEND TO RESUME
THE SHELLING OF BEIRUT AND TRY TO SMASH CHRISTIAN MILITARY
FORCES IN THE NORTH." THESE REPORTS, WRITES EREZ, SAY
THAT 2THE SYRIANS HAVE BEEN USING THE LAST CEASEFIRE TO
PREPARE FOR ANOTHER STRIKE, MORE DECISIVE THAN ALL PREVIOUS
ONES. THEY HAVE BEEN AMASSING AROUND BEIRUT CONSIDERABLE
FORCES, WHICH INCLUDE TWO INFANTRY DIVISIONS, ONE ARMORED
DIVISION, 200 HEAVY GUNS..." EREZ REPEATS A STORY WHICH
APPEARED YESTERDAY IN SOME PAPERS, THAT THE SYRIANS MAY
TRY SOMETHING BIG IN LEBANON, COUNTING ON ISRAEL'S
RELUCTANCE TO REACT IN ANY SIGNIFICANT WAY ON THE EVE OF
THE CAMP DAVID SUMMIT. HITCHCOCK
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